

TUPATO
James 5

God Wants to Do Extraordinary Things Through Ordinary People

James 5:17-18

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In our movies, stories and history classes, we tend to focus on an individual who overcame seemingly impossible odds to do something extraordinary. This helps us to deeply understand valuable virtues and be inspired to develop them in our own lives. These examples of special people help us to prioritize good habits in our own schedule. And as Christians, special people from the past help to inspire greater faith, love, perseverance and boldness in our own lives.

But there is a downside to this focus on one key person – we begin to wrongly believe that they accomplished far more than they did on their own. NONE of those leaders could have done what they did without hundreds, thousands or millions of other unnamed, ordinary people making incredible sacrifices and being sold out for the cause. The key individuals we focus on in history, like Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King – they are actually representative of what many think and do. Unlike pretend superheroes like Superman or Ironman they didn't ***“do it by themselves.”*** On Thursday night, a group of Turkish army officers tried to overthrow the government ***“to reinstall the constitutional order, democracy, human rights and freedoms.”*** But it didn't matter what they wanted or did – if multitudes or others in the army didn't stand up with them it would not make a difference.

Leaders are important – they help bring together people for a goal. But as I say often ***“a person thinks they are a leader, but no one is following, is simply taking a walk in the woods.”*** Now nothing will change without leaders and many like-minded people. But when we start to give ***too much credit*** to individual leaders, historical figures, popular people and “heroes”, we begin to picture these individuals as almost superhuman. We begin to think we could never be like them.

It becomes a real problem in the Christian church when people start thinking this way. On the one hand some crave to be seen as more important than they are and ‘ego’ takes over hindering working together and stifling true spiritual growth. These people see themselves as ones God prefers to work through rather than others. On the other hand, others become groupies of particular leaders - more followers of Apollos, Peter and Paul rather than Jesus. They see their human leader as the one God prefers to work through rather than themselves.

That is where we are in our Bible text today. James has been encouraging us to have confidence in prayer. In v 13, God wants us to have confidence in our own prayers as we face problems in our lives. In v 14-15, God wants us to have confidence in the prayers of our church leaders when we have become overwhelmed with sickness and are losing hope & faith. And in v 16, God wants us to have confidence in our prayers for others (and other's prayer for us) when we are sick – rather than just the leaders, gifted or superstars.

V 16 ends, ***“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*** Do you believe that is true of you personally – that YOUR prayers are powerful and effective? Well Jesus knows

that many of us here will think, *“That’s true for this person and that person, but not me.”* While we see ourselves as *“ordinary people”*, we don’t see God wanting to do extraordinary things through our prayers and our situations in life. So God inspired James to add **v 17-18**. **READ**. Let’s see what our passage has to say.

PROPOSITION: God wants to do extraordinary things through ordinary people, like you and I.

I. We feel inferior to certain other Christians

James 5:17a

A. We think of Elijah (*and other ‘saints’*) as almost ‘superhuman’ I Kings 17-18
The first word in verse 17 is **“Elijah”**. Now if there was ever a superstar believer and “saint”, it was Elijah. Elijah suddenly shows up in one of the most godless times in the history of ancient Israel. He boldly confronts the strongest power of his day – the evil, ruthless King Ahab & Queen Jezebel. These two were not just enticing God’s people to leave true faith and follow false gods, but they were using their military might and the leaders of the false religions to murder God’s true leaders and intimidate others to change their faith. Elijah stands up to them with no human protection! And he’ll do it to other godless tyrants later! Elijah stands up against 850 leaders of those 2 false religions who were murdering and intimidating God’s true followers in much the same way that ISIS is doing in the Levant today. Elijah started a school of prophets. He prayed for a young man to be raised from the dead – and he was. He prayed for an endless supply of food for a widow in the country’s worst drought and it happened. He prayed for fire to come down from heaven and it did. He prayed for the rain to stop for 3 ½ years to confront the nation’s turn away from God, and it didn’t rain. When the crowd turned to the true God, Elijah prayed for rain and it came that day. God even sent a chariot of angels to whisk him away to heaven instead of our traditional death.

If ever there was a superstar – a “saint” that God would listen to their prayers – it was Elijah. He’s the one that God would answer, not us. He is the one whose prayer is powerful and effective, not us!

B. But God says Elijah is just like us

But the verse continues in an unexpected way! READ v 17a. The Lord is telling us here that we are just like Elijah! He is human just like we are here. The book of James was written to many different Christians, in many different churches in many different countries! This book is not just for the Christian superstars, church leaders or those believers we admire the most. We are just like Elijah when it comes to the prayers! God is calling us to boldly and passionately pray! God is making it clear here that He didn’t listen to Elijah’s prayer because Elijah had something that we cannot have. Elijah is just like us in God’s sight. That’s because the key in prayer is not us, but God Himself. He is the one who does miracles, shakes the world, convicts of sin and heals the sick!

C. We are called to pray and be dedicated to Jesus

James 5:16

READ v 16b. Notice there are 2 things Elijah did, which God also wants us to do so that we can join God in His work and see the Lord do more than we could ever think or imagine. **First is to pray.** “**The prayer of ...**” – can’t have a prayer unless we pray something! ☺ And that prayer is to be big! **READ v 16a.** Praying for another person to be healed and genuinely believing that God can do that – that’s a big prayer. And we are to have confidence that God has heard us. Remember, we are asking God for something, so He always gets the final say of how He will respond to our request – in the case of v 16, whether He will physically heal the other person now, in time or in heaven. There is no manipulating God like we try to manipulate fellow employees or fellow students or parents or kids.

READ v 16b. The second God wants us to do is be dedicated to Jesus. It is the prayer of “**a righteous person**” that is powerful. A couple weeks ago I went into more detail of what “righteous” means here, but for simplicity sake no one can be *righteous* as James is speaking about it, without being dedicated to Jesus. I’m using that word “dedicated” today, because some people take the word “**righteous**” and make it a kind of fake perfectionism that most Christians don’t measure up to. That is not what James means here by righteous. This isn’t a perfect person – a small spiritual elite. This is the prayer of someone who is dedicated to Jesus and it can be seen in their desire to obey the Lord as we see in scripture – saying ‘**no**’ to self and ‘**yes**’ to Jesus. It is not perfection but dedication.

D. God loves working through the dedicated, yet not perfect believer

We don’t have to be a leader, famous or a spiritual superstar to have God answer our requests. In fact, God loves to work through the little, the unknown and the nothings of this world – because His glory is seen so much clearer! We do not need to become more famous, think up bigger goals or accomplish greater activities for the Lord to work in our area. God loves to work through the dedicated, yet imperfect believer. Now that is never an excuse for disobedience or laxness. We are just like Elijah. As we saw two weeks ago, right at the time of the greatest revival of his time, Elijah ran away from God’s work, right when the Lord could have used him most. That didn’t stop God from using Elijah before or using Elijah after! If you are a part of this church, you are NOT a perfect believer – perfect believers go to other churches. ☺ You don’t have perfect pastor. Neither of these situations has stopped Jesus from powerfully working in and through the Barre Evangelical Free Church! Jesus loves to work through you and me! God loves working through the dedicated yet imperfect believer. **READ 16b-17a.** That is referring to you – you are a person just like Elijah!

II. Elijah prayed the impossible

James 5:17b-18

A. No rain for 3 ½ years

Let’s also notice that Elijah prayed for the impossible! **READ 5:17b-18.** No one has the power to shut off the rain for 3 ½ years and then turn it back on again when they

pray. This is an impossible prayer! That is the kind of prayers we are to pray! We can pray for the most antagonistic, atheistic person to come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. God wants us to pray earnestly for the impossible. The Psalms tell us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem even as prophecy tells us there will be great warfare! God wants us to pray for the impossible! And Jesus does the impossible! We can pray for the reconciliation of people who hate each other intensely! God wants us to pray for the impossible! We can pray for the healing of the terminally ill, the sobering up of the addicted who has already gone to treatment a dozen time and the people who only care about themselves. And Jesus regularly does the impossible!

B. Ancient Israel was totally dependent on the rain

As Americans we really don't understand how drastically this long drought would affect everyone in the nation. When we use the word "drought" we just mean there is less rain than we need. Elijah prayed that no rain at all would come for 3 ½ years. We have rivers and lakes and springs that provide water during times of drought. But ancient Israel was totally dependent on the rain. In the entire country there was only has one river that runs all year long – the Jordan River. And that river is so far below sea level that it could NOT be used for irrigation at that time. How would people survive with 3 ½ years of no rain? But then how would people be confronted with the eternal devastation of a Christ-less eternity in hell if their world wasn't shaken strongly? This is also a prayer of deepest compassion – whatever it takes Lord and I am willing to make the sacrifices necessary to go with it!

C. God powerful works through prayers of believers

James 5:16

READ v 17-18. Did Elijah stopped the rains for 3 ½ years? No, he didn't have the power to do that. God stopped the rains for 3 1/2 years - but God did that in response to Elijah's prayer. Elijah's prayer lined up to the heart of God. God works powerfully through the prayers of believers – simple believers – new believers – quiet believers – humble believers – believers that no one ever wrote about – believers that feel like they disappoint God at times, but they are believers who are dedicated to Jesus, seeking to follow God's word in the Bible and who ask big prayers that will expand God work in the world, our nation, our town and our families.

III. We give our "pathetically insignificant but sacrificial" for God to multiply

This is another example of where we are being encouraged to give "our pathetically insignificant but sacrificial" to God for Him to multiply. In this case we put sacrificial effort in obeying and serving Jesus, even though it falls far short of the perfection our Lord deserves – then we simply make a really big request of God in prayer. In terms of the problem, it seems so insignificant. Elijah was overwhelmed by the idol worship, the corruptness of the leaders and the destruction of God's work by false religions. God's heart breaks for those things also. So Elijah prays an impossible prayer to stop all that and wake people up. With ISIS doing a similar thing in its caliphate, we can now see how pathetically insignificant that prayer by a single person seems in light of the power of the enemy – Elijah has no army, no strategy, no organization or any funds. Just a prayer! We also see how

sacrificial it is because how will Elijah get food himself – how will he be protected from the armies of the King who is now enraged – and how will Elijah endure the ridicule of the people whose lives have become so much harder with the crushed economy that will result. Again we ask – “Do you have confidence that God wants to hear your prayer as much as Elijah’s?” Do you believe, that in God’s eyes, with simple obedience and dedication to Christ – genuine but not perfect – that you are heard by Jesus just like Elijah was? Do you believe you can pray for the impossible, giving Jesus your pathetically insignificant, but sacrificial – and that He loves to multiply that and do the impossible – far more than we could ever think or imagine? It’s true! **READ v 16b-18.**

A. Pastor Arthur Demosthenes and water for Haiti

Let me tell you about a new friend of mine, Arthur Demosthenes. He is a Haitian who lives in the Boston area and has started two tiny Evangelical Free Churches among the Haitians there.

In 2010, a massive earthquake hit the already impoverished country of Haiti – his country. Around 300,000 people died and another 300,000 were injured. That is 100 times more lives lost than in the Twin Towers attack here in America. Initially 1.5 million people were displaced. Just living in makeshift tents, 60,000 of those were offered semi-arid, otherwise useless land up on a hill if they would move about an hour away from the capital of Port-a-Prince. There were no schools, no roads, no medical facilities, no water, no good fields to farm, no jobs – no infrastructure of any kind. But those 60,000 people had nothing to lose, so they took their few possessions and moved to that unused, otherwise unproductive land. They created 2 new cities with 30,000 in each – New Canaan & New Jerusalem showing they believed Jesus was giving them hope and a new future.

There were no churches and none of the relief agencies were helping, so some Christians in New Canaan contacted Pastor Arthur 5 years ago for some help. How could he help them? He had no money – his two little churches couldn’t afford to pay him so he had to work another job as a public school teacher to pay his own bills. He had no time – a full-time job and pastoring 2 churches left no time. And he was still very much grieving his own losses in the earthquake as his mother and other relatives died in that earthquake. But Pastor Arthur gave his pathetically insignificant – he prayed and agreed to visit one time.

God worked and he was able to establish leadership for a new church there that grew to over 200 people quickly along with many baptisms. Then he helped them see how to do weddings, which had stopped with the earthquake, gathering wedding dresses from the US for the brides. The new church was ready to build a facility but asked Pastor Arthur for help starting a school instead – because the kids in that shanty town hadn’t been in school for 4 years. We helped put the roof on that school. Then last year they brought in the first medical clinic – we helped put the roof on that clinic as well as part of the roof of an addition to the school so more kids could go.

He had no natural desire to start a ministry in Haiti.

to the people in those 2 tiny Haitian churches

God has done incredible things through the pathetically insignificant but sacrificial prayer and then little actions of Pastor Arthur. And we have been able to help 30,000 people whose needs are otherwise unknown to the rest of the world. And every one of you have had a part. 15% of every dollar put into the offering box automatically goes to Christian missions outside our area. So if you have even just given \$1, you have had a part of this. When we combine that first 15% with special offerings and the amount we help missions in our local area, we give about 30% of all the money that comes in to the church in a year for missions. A couple months ago you received a color booklet of our main missions outside our area – but Haiti is NOT one of those. We don't have enough to be able to help them regularly, so the mission's team has been giving our pathetically insignificant, but sacrificial one-time gifts to help in strategic areas – and God has been multiplying.

Elijah's prayer for no rain, then rain reminded me of the help you just gave so the people of New Canaan – especially the school, church and medical clinic could have some water. As they have no wells or rivers, they used to have to walk an hour to get 1 bucket of water. Then last year they were able to get water so each family could have 5 buckets a week and buy 2 more. but more is needed especially for the growing school, clinic and church. Last year one of the top drilling firms in the country drilled down almost 400 ft, but no water. Another NGO tried in another part of the town area went even deeper and also failed totally. So Pastor Arthur prayed an impossible prayer – for 72,000 gallons of water a year for the school and clinic when every human effort had failed. Then God brought an idea to his mind to create a huge cistern and gather all the water off the roofs to the school and clinic – the roofs we helped get the raw materials for. It would need to be 40 feet long, 16 feet wide and 8 feet deep made of reinforced, waterproof concrete. but he would have to raise the \$8,000 during the month of June so they could start digging to get it ready for the rains in late August – grabbing that water would last 6 months. It would take 2 months for the people to hand dig the hole. By the end of June, we were the only church who had responded with a gift – but that was enough and he sent the word to start digging. then by last Sunday they had enough and Arthur brought it over on Monday. God did even more, as a specialist heard about it – gave some specific additional instructions which regular engineers wouldn't do to keep from future cracks – and God brought just the right amount in for those additional changes.

in late May

B. Our June 2016 India offering

This is the privilege we have. When we see a deep need – we get to bring that to God no matter how impossible it seems. And we can have confidence God hears us. We are NOT heard because we are important or great or special. God sees the simple dedicated Christian just like He sees the great prophet Elijah. I face this all the time. Last month we took a special offering for India and I announced to you that the largest offering ever came in - \$18,000 - \$13,000 plus \$5,000 in pledges. I was shocked – we'd never had anything like it for a one-time, one-Sunday offering. The missions committee worked with Wilson before he left to work out some really significant

ministry funded by your gifts. Then one week later, I learned I had been mistaken – it wasn't \$13,000 but \$1,300 that came in. A great extra, one-time offering, especially with the \$1,300 that came in the next week – but nowhere close to the money we pledged – money that will make a significant difference for the advancement of Jesus' work at the very time the government is trying to limit Christian growth. You are the first to hear this story – the missions team didn't even know. I prayed an impossible prayer for another \$10,000+ without discouraging the church, telling others or stifling the work in India. Last I knew we were really close.

C. Final application to our lives (family, friends, world & society around)

Sometime over the next couple months you will face a similar situation – something that causes your heart to break and looks impossible to solve. God wants all the regulars here, all the new believers here and all those visitors here from another church – that your prayers – especially as they seek to see God's Kingdom grow in people, marriages, communities or the world – your prayers are heard just like the prophet Elijah. Keep praying BIG prayers! Give your pathetically insignificant but sacrificial to the cause and leave the rest for Jesus! He will answer in the wisest way. God is good – all the time!